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Darwin Thoreau Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
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Kant Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
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London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse
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**The Excellence of the Rosary
Conferences for Devotions in
Honor of the Blessed Virgin**

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Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Math Josef Frings

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-8620-1

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THE ROSARY

CONFERENCES FOR SODALITIES B. V. M.

I. THE NAME OF THIS DEVOTION

"I was exalted as a rose plant in Jericho." — Eccles. xxiv, 18.

My dear brethren, when Pope Pius IX, on May 23, 1877, gave audience to a number of pious pilgrims he said to them: "Have courage, my dear children! I exhort you to fight against the persecution of the Church and against anarchy, not with the sword, but with the rosary, with prayer and good example." This Pope, who with great wisdom and strong hand has guided for thirty-two years the bark of Peter, which in many violent storms had been rocked to and fro, he who well knew the great dangers of our times, regarded the rosary as a conquering weapon.

What great confidence his successor, Pope Leo XIII, placed in the veneration and invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by means of the rosary! He exhorted all Christianity to pray the rosary daily during the month of October, in order to obtain assistance in these distressing times. In his brief on this occasion Leo XIII says: "It has been a favorite and prevalent custom of Catholics, in times of need and danger, to take refuge in Mary, and to seek consolation from her motherly concern."

Thus the firm reliance and confidence rightly placed by the Catholic Church in the mother of God is staunchly avowed.

As a matter of fact, Mary, the immaculate Virgin, free from original sin, the chosen mother of God, is endowed with such power by her Son, as no other creature, man or angel, has ever received or can receive.

The efficacy of this great devotion to the great Queen of Heaven had been demonstrated especially when false teachings, depravity, or other great enemies threatened disaster to Christians.

History, early and recent, relates how public and private devotion to the mother of God was held in times of calamity and distress, and how these prayers were heard, and help was granted. Thus origi-

nated the exalted titles which Catholics give to the Blessed Virgin, such as Help of Christians, Refuge of Sinners, etc.

To these titles was added another, when under date of December 10, 1883, Leo XIII directed that the title "Queen of the Rosary" be added to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. In his brief the Holy Father expresses the desire that all the faithful practise daily the devotion of the rosary. If, therefore, the rosary is considered of such great power and efficacy by the head of the Church, the representative of Christ, it is befitting that we heed his words and pray often and devoutly by means of the rosary.

If this prayer were better understood it would be prayed with more devotion, and greater benefit would come from it. In order, then, to spread a better knowledge, and to urge the devout recital of the rosary, let us contemplate this devotion in a course of instructive addresses. The name rosary may be the subject of to-day's discourse.

The devotion of the rosary consists in the recital of a fixed number of Our Fathers and Hail Marys, combined with the meditation on certain mysteries from the lives of Jesus and Mary. The name rosary is significant. It is a symbol of Mary, also of the devotion to her. We will endeavor to make this clear.

The realm of nature is the symbol of the realm of grace, as the realm of grace is a symbol of the realm of glory. It was God's intention to let His earthly creation be a reflection of the divine perfections, of the supernatural, of divinity, so that man might perceive the supernatural through created things, and thus more readily understand it. "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. i, 20).

Our first parents obtained a clear conception of the supernatural through the natural things of this life. Nature was to them an open book, in which they could read the divine perfections. Through sin the understanding of man was dimmed and he failed in the interpretation of nature. Instead of being led to God through it, he allowed himself to become estranged, and from a master became the slave of nature.

Then Christ came and redeemed the world from the slavery of sin and again granted to man the clear conception of the true God, as also the right understanding of nature. This is verified in the saints and we have a beautiful example in St. Francis of Assisi. About his interpretation and meditation of nature St. Bonaventure says: "He considered all things created as original from God, and saw in each creature the Creator and Preserver."

Everything in nature was to him a symbol of spiritual life. He took delight especially in flowers, because they reminded him of the flower from the root of Jesse, which refreshes and gladdens the whole world.

See, my dear brethren, this is the correct, the Christian way of contemplating nature. The spiritual world is reflected in the visible.

And Jesus being the King and Mary the Queen in the realm of grace and glory, nature contains symbols that refer to Jesus and Mary. All things of this creation: from the flowers of the valley to the brilliant stars that illumine the night, all things in nature are symbols of the glorious mother of God. Among many such symbols used in Holy Scripture we find Mary called the mystical rose. The Church therefore regards the rose as a symbol of Mary. Let us see in what the likeness consists.

If on a summer's day we enter a garden, where various flowers through their form, color and sweet odor delight and refresh us, our eye is chiefly attracted by the rose. We are especially well pleased with it. The rose is the queen of flowers in form, color and fragrant odor, because of its beauty.

Let us turn now our gaze to the spiritual garden, the Church of Christ. The various flowers there are the faithful, adorned with piety and virtue, and spreading the fragrance of saintliness with which God is pleased. In the Canticle of Canticles the Lamb of God is pictured as feeding among the lilies. A beautiful thought! It tells us how the Lamb of God, our divine Saviour, is fond of the flowers of God, the God-loving souls, as is the lamb of the lilies.

And in this garden of God, the Holy Church, Mary is the rose, the pride of the garden, the queen of the flowers. The rose is therefore the most beautiful symbol of Mary, of all saints the queen, exalted

above all saints in sublimity, beauty, gentleness and sweetness. Therefore, because Mary is among the saints what the rose is among flowers, she is called "the mystical rose." And the name rosary is to remind us of this.

The rose, furthermore, signifies the virtuous life of Mary the virgin. The rosebud is a beautiful symbol of virginity. It is hidden as under a veil. Lovely is the Christian virgin, hidden in the garb of innocence like a rosebud. Mary is the Virgin of Virgins, and can above all be compared to the fair and undefiled rosebud.

The open, blooming rose is an emblem of pure motherhood. Like the opened radiant rose the Christian mother is in the full vigor of life; her heart open with true love for her husband and children; and she unfolds her soul to heaven, so that through prayer she may receive the needed assistance for herself and hers. Through her good example in Christian virtues she spreads around her the fragrance of a God-pleasing life, and encourages those who associate with her to imitate her virtues.

Mary is the immaculate virgin and mother, mother of God, and of all mankind. She is the most noble and perfect of all mothers. Like a magnificent rose she shines in the splendor of her virtues, and is the perfect example for all mothers. Because her heart is fired with love for God and man, she is, as St. Jordanus says, likened to the flaming red rose.

There is no rose but has its thorns. The thorns are a figure of suffering, of sorrow, of the temptations in life, under which only a truly virtuous life can thrive.

St. Brigid relates in her revelations how she at one time was downcast because the enemies of Christ were so powerful, and how she was consoled by the mother of God herself, who told her to remember the rose among the thorns. "The rose," so said Mary, "gives a fragrant odor; it is beautiful to the sight, and tender to the touch, and yet it grows among thorns, inimical to beauty and tenderness. So may also those who are mild, patient, beautiful in virtue, be put to a test among adversaries. And as the thorn, on the other hand, guards, so do wicked surroundings protect the just against sin by demonstrating to them the destructiveness of sin."

The life of Mary was interwoven with many sorrows and she is justly called "a rose among thorns." St. Brigid says: "The Virgin may suitably be called a blooming rose. Just as the gentle rose is placed among thorns, so this gentle Virgin was surrounded by sorrow."

The rose obtains its life through the stem, to which it is closely united. A rose broken from the stem will soon wither. So Mary received all her graces from Jesus, with whom she was united through the liveliest faith and ardent love.

Mary is in truth a spiritual, a mystic rose. The rose therefore is a fitting symbol of the virtuous life of the mother of God. As mystical rose she deserves our admiration and veneration, and she must be our example and model in all Christian virtues, the model of a true spiritual life.

The name rosary, therefore, is well suited to this devotion. For it is a wreath of spiritual roses, as it were, which we place at the feet of Mary, in order to show our love and veneration.

The rose has, moreover, been at all times regarded as a symbol of love. It was already the custom of the early Christians to adorn on feast days the pictures and statues of the saints with wreaths of roses, especially on feast days of the Blessed Virgin.

St. Dominic, inspired and instructed by Mary, formed from the beautiful and efficacious prayers, the Our Father and the Hail Mary, together with the principal mysteries from the lives of Jesus and Mary, a beautiful wreath, and called it the "Rosary."

The threefold mysteries represented in the devotion again give it a resemblance to the rose. The green of the rose is the color of hope and confidence. It is represented in the glorious rosary. The thorns are represented in the sorrowful rosary. The beautiful red petals of the rose, finally, are represented in the joyful rosary, in the glories of Jesus and Mary.

Thus is shown therefore the deep and significant meaning of the name rosary. And as the rosary reminds us of all the virtues, the spiritual beauty and sublimity of Mary, and as it is a worthy manifestation of our love and veneration for the mother of God it is meet that we hold the rosary in high esteem. And Mary finds delight in

this devotion, for it reminds her of all the good God did for her, and for which all nations pronounce her blessed.

Oh, let us then resolve to wind this wreath frequently, to lay it often at the feet of the noble, the gracious queen of the Rosary!

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE ROSARY

"The Highest himself hath founded her." — Ps. lxxxvi.

My dear brethren, in our consideration on the rosary let us to-day reflect upon its origin.

Its origin and age bestow on this devotion a great dignity. From the earliest times of Christianity it has been the custom of the Christians to observe in their prayers method and perseverance. Thus it was the custom of the hermits of the Orient, as far back as the fourth century, to devise a sequence of certain prayers, which they counted on pebbles. We also know that long ago in England a so-called Paternoster-cord was used for this purpose. St. Gregory, at the end of the fourth century, spoke of such a method of devotion in veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This pious bishop thought a wreath of spiritual roses would be more pleasing to the blessed Virgin than the natural roses with which the faithful adorned her altar. He selected, therefore, a number of prayers, in praise of the blessed Virgin, and united them into a wreath. And this was the origin of the rosary, woven by pious hands for the veneration of Mary, the mystical rose.

In the fifth century, St. Brigid urgently commended the devotion of the rosary, and she chose as its prayers the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, and united them into a wreath of prayers. In order to count their recital she strung little beads of stone or wood and made a wreath of them.

This custom subsequently spread through all Christian lands, and through the centuries, to our own days. That this devotion was always in great favor and esteem among pious Christians may be concluded from the fact that in the grave of St. Norbert, who died in 1134, a rosary similar to ours was found.

We have proof, then, that the devotion of the rosary, such as we have it, was practised already in the early days of Christianity. And it was practised not only by monks and nuns, but found adherents among all the faithful.

The particular manner in which we now pray the rosary was brought into vogue by St. Dominic. This is attested by the tradition of six centuries. Twelve Popes bear witness to this fact. We will now speak of the introduction by St. Dominic, and will also refer to the great efficacy of this devotion since its inception. May our reflections contribute to the greater honor of God, and of the glorious Queen of the rosary.

I. The devotion of the rosary in its present form dates its origin from the thirteenth century, and St. Dominic was selected by God as the instrument of its introduction. Spain was the home of this great saint. In one of the valleys of Castile there is situated an humble little village named Calarunga, where his parents possessed a small estate. He was born there in the year 1170. While being baptized his sponsor saw, as if in a vision, a brilliant star over the forehead of the future saint, shedding its brilliant light through the church. As Dominic advanced in years he increased in wisdom, virtue and piety. In due time he devoted himself to theology, believing that in this pursuit alone he could find the wisdom of God. Not in the pleasures of this world, but in the knowledge of God, he sought his pastime. His favorite place was the church and the solitude of the sanctuary. Two incidents from his schooldays throw a light upon his character. At the time of a famine Dominic gave all that he possessed to the poor, even all but the necessary clothes, and when he had nothing more to give, he sold even his beloved books and gave the proceeds to the poor. When berated by people for his excessive generosity, he said: "How could I dare indulge in these lifeless books, when human lives are in danger of starvation?" At another time St. Dominic met a woman who was weeping bitterly because she had no money with which she could release her brother, who had been imprisoned by the Saracens. Dominic offered to sell himself into bondage to release this brother; but since God had destined him to release sinful mankind from the bondage of sin, of error and unbelief, He did not permit Dominic to do as he offered.

At the age of twenty-five he was appointed upon the chapter of the cathedral at Osma. Here he was conspicuous among his brethren on account of his humility, holiness, and zeal for prayer. He spent nine years in Osma, during which time divine Providence prepared him for his important and great vocation. This vocation became plain to him when, in the year 1204, he went to France and saw the terrible devastation which the prevailing heresies had wrought against the Church of Christ. The sight of this disaster nearly broke his heart. The poison of heresy had spread among the faithful with great rapidity, and principally in southern France. From the city of Albi the heretics had assumed the name Albigenses. These Albigenses discarded the doctrines of Christianity and constructed new doctrines that played havoc with morality and social order. They were violent enemies of Church and State, and preached disobedience and rebellion against spiritual and temporal authority. An enemy of the Church is invariably also an enemy of the State; history and experience prove this.

In southern France the Albigenses secured the support of Prince Raimond, of Toulouse, a wealthy and mighty, but, at the same time, a most godless and immoral prince of that time. He had several wives; associated with heretics, and even gave his children to be educated by them. This prince undertook the leadership of the heretical Albigenses, and with them, and other rabble by which France at that time was overrun, scoured the country, robbing and plundering wherever they went. This lawless band, under the direction of this godless prince, robbed churches of their treasures, murdered priests, even tore open the tabernacles and desecrated the most holy Sacrament. A messenger of Pope Innocent III was murdered by one of these knaves, who then found the protection of this depraved prince. Under these conditions the Pope finally saw the necessity of preaching a crusade against these heretics, who surpassed even the Saracens in the outrages committed. A terrible war then ensued, in which these enemies of Church and State were subdued, but not converted. For this there was necessary an extraordinary spiritual effort, and divine Providence had already prepared the instrument. St. Dominic was the tool in the hand of God to introduce and apply an efficacious remedy, and this remedy was the rosary.

Dominic had for many years taught the doctrines of the Catholic Church to the heretics, and had converted a number of them, but not enough to satisfy his holy zeal. He often turned with humility to God and besought Him with tears, and deeds of penance, that He might let him know how to accomplish better results. Since childhood he had been a faithful servant of Mary, and had often said that the devotion to her was a powerful means of converting heretics and sinners.

Finally his prayers were heard in a miraculous way. One day, while on his way from Toulouse, Dominic threw himself down on his knees and resolved not to cease praying until his prayers were heard. Then, so the legend tells us, the glorious Queen of heaven appeared to him, spoke words of encouragement, and taught him how to pray the rosary, assuring him that this would be the right weapon to conquer error and sin. With joy Dominic arose and returned to Toulouse, and began to spread the use of the rosary, as Mary had taught him and in the way we now recite it. He preached this devotion, explained it, and taught the people how to pray it. It proved indeed a most efficacious means for the conversion of apostates, heretics, and sinners. Since the lack of knowledge in matters of faith had been the real cause why heresy so quickly spread, the principal truths of faith and morals were now communicated to the people through the rosary, and the principles of a Christian life were taught them in this most sublime prayer of the Church. This was bound to bring results, and we will give now some thought to these results.

II. According to the historians of those ages the effects of the rosary sermons of St. Dominic were truly wonderful. In all cities where he preached, the people gathered in great numbers to hear his heaven-inspired words and to pray the rosary with St. Dominic. Sinners were converted, the faithful were strengthened and fortified, and many thousands of those who had been led into heresy opened their hearts again to the true faith and returned to the holy Church. The inspired words of St. Dominic met with such splendid results that, even if the tradition did not tell us so, the miraculous effects of this devotion would prove its heavenly inspiration, and Pius IX, Leo XIII, as many Popes before them, have publicly avowed

their belief that St. Dominic received the rosary from our blessed Mother.

The promise which Dominic received was fulfilled. Where all other means had failed, the humble prayer of the rosary accomplished the victory over heresy. Thus divine wisdom and infinite power make use of humble things to effect great achievements. Of this the great work of the redemption gives us an example. God made the Cross the instrument of the redemption. The despised Cross, once a shame and disgrace, was raised on the height of Calvary and became the instrument of the redemption for all the world, the fountain of grace, a blessing for time and eternity, the symbol of victory and glory.

St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, writes: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not in loftiness of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of Christ. For I judge not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in the showing of the spirit and power. That your faith might not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness: But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God; for the foolishness of God is wiser than men; but the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong. That no flesh should glory in his sight" (I Cor. i and ii). And so did God choose the rosary, this humble prayer, to work such great things, that human effort had not been able to accomplish. What an incentive to put all our trust in God, rather than in our own strength!

The devotion of the rosary soon spread from southern France to all other Catholic lands, and all peoples welcomed it with joy and prayed it with great zeal. Rosary societies were formed and approved of by the Popes, and were richly endowed with many indulgences. Ever since there has been no other prayer practised so diligently as the rosary. And often there have been recorded miraculous effects of this devotion, no less miraculous than the conversion of the heretics in the south of France.

The devotion as now practised is therefore in use over seven hundred years. The wonderful origin, its great age and the remarkable miracles that were wrought by its use at all times, bestow a great dignity on this devotion.

When we consider the conditions that prevailed at the time of the origin of the rosary, and for the betterment of which divine Providence provided this devotion, we can not fail to realize a similarity of conditions in our own times. Materialism and unbelief, connected with widespread immorality, are now prevalent as they were then. They are causing great injury to Church, State, and homes, and will become more destructive if not checked by the right weapon. Pope Pius IX, as also Pope Leo XIII, have declared the rosary to be that weapon, and have exhorted Christianity to resort to the zealous use of it. If all Christians would follow the advice of these supreme Pontiffs, we should soon see the Catholic faith and good morals come into their own again, and ample blessing would, through this devotion, be bestowed upon private and public life. All the insistent endeavors of world-wise scholars and reformers will be of no avail if God's blessing does not rest upon their work. Only then, when the true faith and a life of faith are made the standard of public and private merit and ethics, will the temporal, no less than the eternal, welfare of nations and of individuals be assured.

Let us, through the rosary, call to Mary for her powerful intercession in the battle of the Church against the enemies of faith and morals, and with her intercession we shall be sure of victory. Amen.

III. THE POWER OF THE ROSARY

"Lo, here is the sword of Goliath. . . . There is none like that, give it to me."—I Kings xxi, 9.

SYNOPSIS.—*David, with God's assistance, his only weapon a pebble, slew the giant. God gives us, as our weapon, the rosary. This has proven efficacious in the battles of the Church against heretics and heathen armies. Examples: Albigenses; Turks at Lepanto and Belgrade; many epidemics abated or averted by the power of the rosary. This devotion is just as powerful for the individual and for the family.*

God has shown us that He wishes many to co-operate with the Church and with the Christian in their fight for faith and salvation. Let all use this weapon.

My dear brethren, in the first book of Kings we read how the Philistines went forth to battle against the Israelites. The Philistines arrayed their forces on a mountain, and the Israelites occupied a mountain on the opposite side, so that the valley was between them. Then there went out from the hordes of the Philistines a man named Goliath, a giant of enormous strength, who challenged the Israelites to let one of their men fight him hand to hand, the result of this contest to decide the victory or defeat of either army. A youth named David, inspired and urged by the spirit of God, went forth with a few smooth stones and a sling to meet this Philistine, and as Goliath rushed toward him David cast the stones with the sling and struck the Philistine in the forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth. David then ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and slew him. Israel thus gained the victory over the Philistines. But when for this victory exceeding praise was given to David, King Saul became angry and sought the life of the youthful hero. In his flight David came to Nob. Not having any weapon, he said to the high priest Achimelech: "Hast thou here at hand a spear or a sword?" The high priest answered: "Lo, here is the sword of Goliath, whom thou slewest in the valley of Terebinth, if thou wilt take this, for there is no other but this." And David said, "There is none like that, give it me."

These last words, which I have made the text for my address today, we may fitly apply to the holy rosary. For the rosary has ever since its origin proven itself a conquering weapon for the Church, as also well as for the individual Christian, against the most powerful enemies of God and of His Church. Let us consider the fact for the greater glory of God and of the Queen of the rosary.

Since the introduction of the rosary by St. Dominic, for more than six hundred years therefore, the great victories of Christianity against the many and ferocious enemies of the Church are ascribed to the devotion of the rosary. The Church has at all times had enemies, who with all their power and in all their evil ways have opposed and persecuted her. Nor is this surprising. Ever since Satan succeeded in beguiling our first parents into sin, he has continued to

sow dissention among mankind. Beginning with Cain and Abel, there have been children of God who obeyed God's commandments, and, on the other hand, children of Satan, as holy Scripture calls them, who seek their salvation in the pleasures of this life. Since the time of Cain and Abel, mankind has been split into two divisions, one seeking the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world, the kingdom of Satan.

When our Saviour conquered Satan He left him power over those who make themselves slaves to the sensual pleasures, and thus there exists an evil force against the Church, and it will exist to the end of time. This is a fact that we must keep in view in order to fully understand and judge the conditions. The realm of darkness, Satan's realm, stands opposed to the realm of Christ. Satan and his adherents carry on the warfare against the Church of Christ, as they assaulted Christ Himself. "As they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," so did Christ prophecy.

The Church of Christ demands the subjection of the flesh; she preaches against luxury, pride and selfishness. She preaches chastity and submission to the commandments of God; she preaches penance alike to those of high and low station in life. This angers all those who would indulge in the evil things of this world. They cry: "Let us break her bonds asunder; and let us cast away her yoke from us." But as Christ foretold the persecution of His Church, so He also foretold that the gates of hell would not prevail against her. The Church of God will in due time conquer all her enemies, some will be converted, while others who are obstinate will perish in the battle. In all these battles and victories of the Church, Mary, blessed mother of her divine Founder, co-operates with the Church through her intercession. Mary was already spoken of in paradise as the one who would come to tread upon the head of the serpent, the spirit of darkness. This she has done by becoming the mother of God, by bringing forth the Redeemer. And as Jesus through Mary's co-operation came into this world, so He desires her co-operation in ruling the world. The history of the contests and Victories of the Church verify this throughout the centuries.

The evil spirit has a twofold weapon with which he assails and combats God's Church; namely, the godless rulers of the world and

heresy. Through the godless authorities of the world Satan has endeavored since the beginning to crush the Church; through heresy he attempts to destroy the Church by internal dissension. Both weapons are used together, for heresy and calumny can not prevail without substantial support, and heretics seek worldly power and assistance. On every page of Church history we find recorded the clashes planned by these evil forces, from which the Church always came out not conquered, but a conqueror.

The history of the veneration of Mary tells us that the Blessed Virgin Mary helped to win these victories. During the early times, when fierce battles against the Church were raging, bishops and priests knew of no more efficacious means to avert these dangers than to exhort the faithful to pray to the Blessed Virgin. Thus we read in history that the holy bishops and martyrs Ignatius and Irenaeus did this in the second century, and in the third century it was Pope Calixtus who advised the faithful to take refuge with the Blessed Virgin in time of persecution of the Church. And so on through all Christian times.

Since the introduction of the rosary by St. Dominic all great victories have been credited to the devotion of the rosary. The first great conquest of the Church effected by the rosary was the victory over the Albigenses, who had spread heresy in southern France and had caused great havoc in Church and State.

St. Bernard complained in those times: "The churches are empty, the people without priests, the Sacraments without reverence. People on their deathbed refuse the assistance of the Church, ridicule penance."

How the weapon with which this heresy was conquered was the rosary we have related in a previous sermon. This was the first glorious victory through the devotion of the rosary. It was the sword with which the Church slew the proud Goliath of heresy.

Another wonderful victory through this miraculous weapon of Christianity was the defeat of the Turkish navy at Lepanto, on October 7, 1571. The so-called reformation, of which Martin Luther was the originator, had spread over the whole of Europe, bringing in its trail destruction, dissension and war. The Turks, who had long thirsted for vengeance upon the Christians, found situations favor-